

AGE-OLD Lessons

Americans are living an average of 78 years, based on a 2006 CDC report. While aging often brings with it dementia and frailty, many seniors are living healthier and better than in recent decades. So what makes the difference? And what is “normal” aging?

We can look at many theories over the years and find no consensus. The process of aging remains a mystery. The Baltimore Longitudinal Study on Aging, sponsored by the National Institute on Aging, has been seeking the answers for more than 50 years. Here are some findings:

Normal aging is different from disease. As our bodies change with time and use, virtually every major system – cardiovascular, nervous, muscle, skeletal, digestive – gets weaker and less efficient on a cellular level. But these changes do not automatically lead to such common diseases as high blood pressure, dementia and arthritis. Disease often results from processes other than wear and tear.

We all age differently. Some people stay strong and active much longer than others. Genetics, environment, and illness affect the rate of aging. Those differences become more apparent as we get older – and make the study of aging very complex.

Most gerontologists don’t expect to find a magic bullet to prolong life or youth, but believe we may avoid speeding up the aging process through personal lifestyle. The choices are obvious: Don’t smoke. Avoid alcohol and weight gain. Get adequate nutrition and sleep. Relax and enjoy yourself.

And exercise! If maintaining a healthy heart, mental function, strong muscles and flexible joints are part of staying young, then exercise is essential. Unlike expensive potions that promise to detain or reverse aging, exercise usually costs nothing, except a few minutes each day – remember this when you want to slow the hands of time.

Sources:

“Can We Prevent Aging?” National Institute on Aging, 2/19/09. Acc. 5/13/09 at www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation/Publications/preventaging.htm

“Healthy Aging: Lessons from the Baltimore Longitudinal Study of Aging.” National Institute on Aging, 12/12/08. Acc. 5/13/09 at www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation/Publications/BSA/

BEST BITS

Take 3 Steps, says the CDC, to fight the flu. 1 Get a flu shot every year, recommended for most everyone. 2 Practice prevention. Clean your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based sanitizers. Use a tissue to cover coughs and sneezes. If you get the flu, stay home. Avoid touching your nose, mouth and eyes. 3 Use antiviral flu drugs with your provider's okay; take within 2 days of symptoms.

Source:

"CDC says 'Take 3' Steps to Fight the Flu." CDC, 3/12/09. Acc. 5/1/09 at www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/preventing.htm.

Celebrate Healthy Aging Month in September! Sponsored by the National Institutes of Health, this event is designed to focus attention on the positive aspects of growing older – a good thing to do since the number of centenarians, people who live past the age of 100, is increasing. In 2002, the number was 58,684. The projected number of centenarians in 2050 is: (a)112,000, (b)238,000, or (c)1,150,000. The answer is c. What's your IQ on aging? Take the quiz at www.niapublications.org/tipsheets/agingiq.asp.

Source: "What's Your Aging IQ?" National Institute on Aging, 12/30/05. Acc. 5/13/09 at www.niapublications.org/tipsheets/agingiq.asp

Tips for avoiding Lyme disease: Check your clothing and body for disease-toting ticks before going indoors. To remove ticks from skin see www.cdc.gov/ticks/tick_removal.html. Risk of Lyme disease is small if ticks are removed within 24 hours. Get medical help if you notice symptoms: fever, chills, fatigue, swollen lymph nodes, aches or a rash.

Source: Learn about Lyme Disease. CDC. Acc. 2/26/09 at www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/lyme/resources/DVBID_%20Home%20Page%20_%20CDC%20Lyme%20Disease2.pdf.

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SPECIAL REPORT

QUIZ: Your Aching Joints

The most common joint disease is osteoarthritis. It often occurs in the weight-bearing joints – your knees, hips and low back – making it a very common cause of disability. Best prevention tip: Maintain a healthy weight to ease the burden on your joints. Take the quiz to learn more.

1. The cause of osteoarthritis (OA) is not clear.

True False

2. Which symptom is not typical of osteoarthritis?

- a. Pain
- b. Tenderness
- c. Discoloration
- d. Swelling

3. Before middle age, the most common cause of osteoarthritis is joint injury.

True False

4. The most effective exercise for people with arthritis is:

- a. Range-of-motion
- b. Strengthening
- c. Aerobic
- d. All of the above

5. A treatment option for mild osteoarthritis is:

- a. Strict bed rest
- b. Strenuous activity
- c. Braces or shoe inserts
- d. Heat and cold avoidance

1. *True* – The cause of OA is unclear but several factors may contribute, including age, injury, genetic defect and overweight. It usually involves loss of cartilage, the cushioning material covering the ends of your bones where they meet in a joint. When you lose cartilage, your bones may rub together, a motion that can lead to symptoms and may permanently damage the joint.

2. *c* – In addition to pain and swelling, stiffness and decreased joint motion are other common symptoms; however skin discoloration is not.

3. *True* – To lower risk of OA, prevent trauma and serious overuse of your joints. Examples: Wear proper sports shoes for support and cushion; don't overdue activities; stop activity if something hurts.

4. *d* – People with arthritis should focus on exercise that increases strength and flexibility to help protect the joints against pain and further

cartilage damage. Always start new activities gradually, and check with your provider before making significant changes in your exercise routine, especially if you have osteoarthritis.

5. *c* – Braces or shoe inserts, mild-to-moderate exercise, and physical therapy can help you control arthritis. Heat may relieve pain, while cold reduces swelling.

More prevention tips: To protect your joints, **stay lean; stay safe** from overuse injuries during sports and vigorous exercise; and **stay nourished** with foods rich in vitamins C and D. **Sources of D:** sunlight, fortified milk and yogurt, and supplements with 400 IU of vitamin D a day (600 IU after age 70).

MORE INFO Arthritis Foundation, www.arthritis.org

Sources:

“Osteoarthritis.” Mayo Clinic, 10/11/07. Acc. 5/4/09 at www.mayoclinic.com/health/osteoarthritis/DS00019/METHOD=print.

“Exercising with arthritis.” Mayo Clinic 8/16/08. Acc. 5/4/09 at www.mayoclinic.com/health/arthritis/AR00009

“10 ways you can protect your joints.” Arthritis Foundation, 2009. Acc. 5/4/09 at www.arthritis.org.

“Osteoarthritis – Prevention.” WebMD, 4/20/07. Acc. 5/17 at www.webmd.com/osteoarthritis/tc/osteoarthritis-prevention?print=true

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FITNESS

NEAT Ways to Weight Loss

You may not know it, but every time you write, talk, fidget and even sleep, your body experiences *non-exercise activity thermogenesis* (NEAT).

NEAT refers to the calories you burn doing virtually anything other than planned exercise. Researchers have found that people with healthy weight burn more calories through NEAT, or simply by moving more, than those who are overweight or obese.

It’s a challenge to stay active in our busy, sit-down world. Whether you want to lose weight or keep it off, balancing calories consumed with calories burned is the key.

If you do this:

Take the bus to work.

Try this:

Get off one stop early and

walk.

Have dinner delivered.

Use the elevator.

Watch your kids play.

Use the closest parking spot.

Buy pre-cut foods.

Watch TV after dinner.

Sit still in your chair.

Use the car wash.

Use an electric or gas mower.

Float in the pool.

Sit while you talk on the phone.

Walk to the restaurant to eat.

Take the stairs.

Play with them.

Park at the edge of the lot.

Slice up produce by hand.

Use a treadmill while you watch.

Fidget.

Wash the car by hand.

Mow with a push model.

Swim or tread water.

Pace while you chat.

Reminder: Get at least 30 minutes of physical activity every day. Plus, add NEAT bits of movement to your routine.

Note: Get your health care provider's okay before changing or beginning your exercise routine.

[Outline]

You can take small steps to a NEAT lifestyle. You don't need to join a gym or buy fancy equipment to burn more calories.

More Info Small Step, www.smallstep.gov

Sources:

"A Key to 'Low Metabolism' — and Major Factor in Obesity." Mayo Clinic, 1/27/05. Acc. 10/24/07 at <http://www.mayoclinic.org>.

"Take Small Steps Today." HHS.gov, 2007. Acc. 10/29/07 at http://www.smallstep.gov/ga/take_small_steps_today.html.

Muscle Workouts You Can't Resist

What can elasticized resistance bands do for your fitness?

These bands, which resemble jump ropes, can help you do many of the things strength training does, including increasing lean muscle mass, burning calories, reducing body fat, and improving balance.

When using the bands, the resistance comes from pulling and stretching rather than from gravity. Since you can pull them in multiple directions, you can work and strengthen many joints and muscles.

HOW TO:

Use resistance bands for exercises usually done with free weights or other equipment. **Examples:** bicep curls, rowing, squats, or chest presses.

Begin gradually and learn proper technique to avoid straining. Try two 20-minute sessions a week and focus on certain muscle groups each time. When it begins to feel easy, increase the resistance.

If you're a beginner or have joint difficulties, get your provider's okay first. Bands are inexpensive and portable for use at home, in the office, or when traveling. ***How can you resist?***

Exercise Band Safety

Injuries from elastic exercise bands can occur if they break when in use. Before starting your workout, the American College of Sports Medicine suggests that you inspect them for wear, tears or other damage. Do not use damaged bands, don't over-stretch them, and use them only for their original purpose.

Sources:

"Hard-To-Resist Exercises." Mayo Clinic Women's HealthSource, 12/08: 7.

"Improving Strength and Balance with Elastic Resistance Bands." Wellsphere. Acc. 4/21/09 at www.wellsphere.com/exercise-article/improving-strength-and-balance-with-elastic-bands/513383.

Personal Best, 2/03.

GOAL LINE: Craving sweets? Wait 15 minutes, brush your teeth or drink water. Omitting alcohol, excess sugar and caffeine may curb cravings.

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MENTAL WELL-BEING

Write Way to Raise Your Spirits

If you're suffering an unhappy event, writing about it in a journal can make you feel better, based on research. In part, writing organizes your thoughts, which makes the experience feel less chaotic. It also provides an emotional release and insight into yourself and your ability to manage the situation.

A study in the *Annals of Behavioral Medicine* (8/02) found that participants who used journaling to express and understand their feelings

derived the most health benefits, including less stress and improved well-being.

Putting negative emotions into words doesn't always come naturally. There are no rules, except these writing sessions are for you alone unless you choose to share them. Your personal journal allows you to explore and quietly vent your negative feelings. In the private world of journaling, grammar, spelling and format are irrelevant. What does matter is the opportunity to release troublesome emotions about anything or anyone in your life.

Journaling allows you to examine stressful or negative circumstances and move forward with a solution. Just knowing you have choices builds confidence, reduces the stress that's disrupting your life and increases your sense of control.

Set aside time each day to journal, or as often as you can. Choose a quiet, private place to write. No matter what the problem, if it's negatively affecting your life, pull out your pen (or fire up your laptop), and get started. Do it for you.

Sources:

"Writing to Relieve Stress." Parenting.org, 6-8/03. Acc. 5/6/09 at www.parenting.org/archive/tween/safety/2003/Jun_Aug03_writing.asp.

Ullrich, Philip M., M.A.; Lutgendorf, Susan K., Ph.D. "Journaling About Stressful Events: Effects of Cognitive Processing and Emotional Expression." *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, Vol. 24, No. 3, 2002.

Mind Your Mental Health

Help for Life's Challenges

At some point, everyone faces personal hardships. At those times, you learn what you're made of – it's probably stronger stuff than you might guess. Whether you are facing divorce, economic loss, or illness, look to your internal strength to manage your external turmoil in positive ways.

Having strong coping strategies can also be a great help.

The first step is to learn as much as possible. If you're facing a divorce or recovering from an injury, think about how this event will impact your life in the next few weeks and years. Collect all the facts and make sure you're viewing the situation realistically. A problem that feels all-consuming may seem easier if you see it in relation to your entire life.

Watch for unhealthy habits. During stressful times, it's easy to stumble along the way and make negative choices, such as abusing

alcohol or overeating. But these are warning signs that you're not coping well or accepting the change. Get help before your behavior makes matters worse.

Get support. Don't isolate yourself or be afraid to ask for help. Talking with friends about your fears and frustrations can help you cope emotionally. Seek advice for the problem, especially from those who've had similar experiences. Consider joining a support group or check with your company's employee assistance program.

Self-Help: A good way to regain your self-esteem is by taking time out to do something positive for you. Start an exercise program or volunteer for some charity work. Make sound sleep and nutrition a priority every day. Try to write down your feelings – read the article above to learn how.

Source: "Deal Better with Hard Times." Live Your Life Well/Mental Health America, 2009. Acc. 5/13/09 at www.nmha.org/go/live-your-life-well/deal

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SELF CARE

Terminal Fitness

American adults can spend 2-12 hours in front of a computer each day. Whether the draw is Web surfing or work, an ergonomic workstation can help you avoid eyestrain and common overuse injuries. Give your workstation a once-over with this checklist.

Monitor:

- Clean your screen.
- Adjust brightness and contrast to comfort.
- Position 20-26 inches directly in front of you.
- Keep the top of the monitor at eye level when you're seated.
- Tilt the screen back 10-20 degrees.

Chair:

- Adjust your chair's backrest height to support your lower back.
- Keep feet flat on the floor.
- Avoid slouching on armrests.
- Avoid sitting still for long periods – get up periodically and move around.

Keyboard and mouse:

- Adjust keyboard so shoulders can relax.
- Keep keyboard and mouse close so you don't need to reach for it.
- When keyboarding, keep forearms parallel to the floor and wrists in a neutral position.
- Place your mouse next to the keyboard and at the same height as the keyboard.
- Avoid resting your hand on your mouse when you're not using it.

Lighting:

- Close drapes and blinds to reduce glare.
- Place monitor at a 90° angle to windows.
- Reduce overhead lighting.
- Use a glare screen on your monitor.

Tip: Blink your eyes often to keep them from drying out; shift your vision away from your screen frequently to reduce eye muscle fatigue. Periodically stretch your wrists, shoulders and back. During breaks, walk briskly to increase your circulation.

Sources:

"Ergonomics for Computer Workstations." Office of Research Services/NIH. Acc. 4/17/09 at dohs.ors.od.nih.gov/ergo_computers.htm.

"Ergonomic Workstation Guidelines." NC State University Environmental Health & Safety. Acc. 4/17/09 at www.ncsu.edu/ehs/www99/right/handsMan/office/ergonomic.html.

Indoor Allergens Room-By-Room

If you have allergies or asthma, every room in your home may contain allergens – substances that trigger allergic symptoms. Here's how to clear the air as the season moves you indoors more:

House dust – It accumulates even in the cleanest home and its allergenic components, such as dust mites, trigger symptoms year-round.

Tips: Keep your mattress, box springs and pillows in allergen-proof zippered covers. Use a vacuum with a HEPA filter or double bag. Removing carpeting and heavy window coverings can reduce dust, too.

Cockroaches – Roaches are a leading asthma trigger; children are especially vulnerable. ***Tips:*** Keep your home clean and dry. Fix water leaks and keep food and garbage containers sealed. Clean your kitchen regularly and thoroughly. In some regions, professional extermination may be required.

Indoor mold – Mold releases spores that trigger allergy symptoms and grow easily in damp, humid environments. *Tips:* Fix roof and pipe leaks. Do not use damp areas for storage. Keep all rooms ventilated, especially kitchens, bathrooms and basements. Run fans in bathrooms after showering.

Animal dander – Allergic people react to a protein in the saliva, dead skin or urine from furry animals. If giving up your pet is out of the question, try to minimize exposure. Keep pets out of your bedroom and other heavily used rooms. *Tips:* Bathing pets weekly and controlling house dust may help.

Sources:

“Tips to Remember: Indoor allergens.” AAAAI, 2007. Acc. 5/5/09 at www.aaaai.org/patients/publicedmat/tips/indoorallergens.stm.

“Indoor Allergy Survival Tips.” ACAAI, 2009. Acc. 5/5/09 at www.acaai.org/public/indoor/indoor.htm.

“Indoor Air Quality and Allergies.” AAFA, 2005. Acc. 5/5/09 at www.aafa.org/display.cfm?id=9&sub=18&cont=233.

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SAFETY

Planning for Power Failures

Power failures force us to put our lives on hold – fortunately, not usually for long. However, the largest and longest power outage in U.S. history darkened more than 8 cities, affected 1.5 million people, and lasted nearly 50 hours. So it pays to be prepared for the long haul.

Get ready for the unexpected before it happens – gather supplies and establish a plan early. Here are recommendations from the American Red Cross and the CDC.

Have enough water to stay hydrated in extreme summer heat; in the winter, pack blankets and wear warm layers. Power outages can occur at any time and in any weather.

Establish a rendezvous point for family members who are away from home when a blackout occurs.

Consider a backup power generator if power failures are common in your area. Have it professionally installed and keep it outside (due to potential carbon monoxide leaks).

Pack an emergency kit that will last at least 3 days.

Include:

- ⌚ flashlights and batteries
- ⌚ battery-operated radios
- ⌚ candles and matches or lighters
- ⌚ multi-purpose fire extinguisher
- ⌚ drinking and cooking water
- ⌚ sleeping bags
- ⌚ blankets
- ⌚ coolers with bagged ice
- ⌚ canned goods and manual can opener
- ⌚ paper plates and utensils
- ⌚ food bars
- ⌚ first aid supplies
- ⌚ a whistle
- ⌚ 12-hour light sticks
- ⌚ heavy-duty work gloves
- ⌚ personal hygiene items

Tip: Camping equipment can be handy but be cautious – use grills and fuel-burning lamps outdoors to avoid carbon monoxide leaks.

Sources:

"What You Need to Know When the Power Goes Out Unexpectedly." CDC, 9/16/08. Acc. on 5/6/09 at emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/poweroutage/needtoknow.asp.

"NPM 2009: Are You Ready or Are You *Ready?*" Homeland Security, 2009. Acc. on 5/6/09 at www.ready.gov/america/npm09/index.html.

"Health and Safety Concerns – Power Outages." Ohio Committee for Severe Weather Awareness. Acc. on 4/22/09 at www.weathersafety.ohio.gov/WinterPowerOutages.aspx.

Trampoline Safety

Jumping, twirling and somersaulting through the air from a trampoline is a popular backyard pastime. However, trampoline play is the source of many injuries every year in the U.S.

The word from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) to parents: Don't buy a trampoline or allow your children to use them at other homes. Home use of trampolines isn't safe, even with adult supervision, says the AAP.

From 2000-2005, 531,378 ER visits were due to trampoline injuries – an average of 88,563 annually. The most injuries occurred in kids ages 5-12, and 95% of all cases occurred using home models. This rate was more than double the number of annual trampoline-

related ER visits during 1990-1995.

Common injuries include neck and spinal cord trauma resulting in permanent paralysis or death; broken bones; sprains and strains; and bruises and cuts. Most injuries resulted from: landing incorrectly while jumping; colliding with someone else on the trampoline; landing on the trampoline's frame or springs; falling or jumping off the trampoline; and during stunts.

Bottom line: Talk with your kids and explore the many other ways they can stay physically active, have a good time and play safely.

Sources:

"Trampolines." AAP, 3/07. Acc. 5/1/09 at www.aap.org/publiced/BR_Trampolines.htm.

"Trampoline injuries on the rise, study shows." Rhode Island Hospital, 7/9/07. Acc. 5/6/09 at www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/07/070706104207.htm.

GOAL LINE: To lose weight, try lifting it. Strength training builds muscle, which keeps you active and burning more calories.

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EATING SMART

Getting the Most from Your Produce

3 reasons to store fresh produce properly: To maximize its nutrient value, to enjoy it at its flavorful best – and both can ensure that you get your daily quota of fruits and vegetables. Here are some basic guidelines:

- For counter top storage keep produce out of direct sunlight.
- Don't store produce in sealed plastic bags on the counter; this depletes oxygen, slows ripening and may speed decay.
- When storing produce in the refrigerator, separate fruits and vegetables to reduce exposure to *ethylene* (an odorless, harmless gas emitted after picking produce) which can accelerate ripening. To speed up ripening: in a bowl or paper bag add one ripe apple for every 5 to 7 pieces of fruit to be ripened.

- To store fresh greens or herbs, place them unwashed in perforated plastic bags with a damp paper towel.

Proper Storage Guide for Produce

Storage Location	Fruits and Melons	Vegetables	
Store in Refrigerator	apples (more than 7 days) apricots Asian pears blackberries blueberries cherries cut fruits figs grapes raspberries strawberries	artichokes asparagus green beans lima beans beets Belgian endive broccoli Brussels sprouts cabbage carrots cauliflower celery cut vegetables	green onions herbs (not basil) leafy vegetables leeks lettuce mushrooms- store okra – store in a p peas radishes spinach sprouts summer squashes sweet corn
Ripen on the Counter first, then Store in Refrigerator	apples avocados kiwifruit nectarines peaches pears plums		
Store only at room temperature	bananas grapefruit lemons limes mandarins mangoes oranges papayas pineapple pomegranates watermelon	cucumbers dry onions eggplant garlic ginger peppers potatoes pumpkins winter squashes sweet potatoes tomatoes	
Store in a cool dry place		acorn squash butternut squash onions (away from potatoes) potatoes (away from onions) pumpkins spaghetti squash sweet potatoes winter squash	
Store these high-ethylene producers away from other produce	avocados nectarines peaches pears		

	apples apricots cantaloupe figs honeydew plums tomatoes bananas		
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Sources:

Adel Kader, Jim Thompson, and Kathi Sylva. "Storing fresh fruits and vegetables for better taste." Postharvest Technology Research and Information Center, UC, Davis . 1/1/00.Acc. 4/20 at <http://homeorchard.ucdavis.edu/FVstorage.pdf>.

CDC, www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov.

Diet Detective

Tip:

Avoid stashing your fruit and veggies in refrigerator produce drawers – store them front and center so you won't forget them.

Bottom line: Eat perishable produce when it's fresh. This means within 3-4 days, especially for more fragile foods like berries, greens and asparagus.

RECIPE OF THE MONTH

Veggie Penne with Herbs

1 tbsp olive oil
1 medium green bell pepper, thinly sliced
1 cup fresh mushrooms, sliced
1/4 tsp red pepper flakes
3-4 small shallots, sliced
3 medium fresh tomatoes, seeded and chopped
2 tbsp each fresh oregano and basil, chopped
1 15-oz can low-sodium tomato sauce
1/2 cup reduced-sodium chicken broth
12 ounces whole-wheat penne pasta

1 In a large saucepan heat oil over medium-high temp; sauté bell pepper, mushrooms and pepper flakes 3 minutes; add shallots and sauté 3 more minutes.

2 Stir in tomatoes and herbs and cook 1 minute.

3 Add tomato sauce and broth and bring to a boil; lower heat and simmer covered 15-20 minutes, stirring occasionally. Meanwhile, cook pasta as

directed.

4 Spoon sauce over pasta and serve. Pass the Parmesan cheese.

MAKES 7 CUPS (5 servings).

Per serving: 341 calories | 12.2g protein | 5.4g fat | 66g carbs | 8.8g fiber | 509mg sodium

GOAL LINE: Kick tobacco with a little help from your provider. Discuss nicotine replacement aids – patches, gum, lozenges, inhaler and nasal spray.

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EXPERT ADVICE

Q: How does exercise lengthen lifespan?

Adding years to your life is a well-documented benefit of exercise. While we don't know exactly how exercise improves longevity, we do know that **staying physically active throughout life can help us:**

- Delay or prevent conditions, including heart disease, high blood pressure, osteoporosis, obesity, diabetes, and some cancers, that can lead to premature death.
- Reduce the effects of chronic pain, depression, anxiety and excess stress.
- Reduce pain from arthritis and old injuries, and improve balance, which lowers the risk of injury.
- Remain active by keeping tendons, ligaments and joints flexible and resilient.
- Stay mobile and independent during later years.

It's never too late to improve your health and longevity with exercise. Get your provider's okay first; then gradually build up to at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise 5 days a week.

Elizabeth Smoots, MD, FAAFP

Sources:

“Exercise and physical activity: Getting fit for life.” National Institute on Aging, 2/19/09. Acc. 4/30/09 at www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation/Publications/exercise.htm.

“Study shows middle age is not too late to start exercising to prolong your life.” WebMD, 2009. Acc. 4/30/09 at www.webmd.com/fitness-exercise/news/20090305/live-longer-with-midlife-exercise.

Q: Naps okay?

Napping isn't just for preschoolers, the elderly and cats. In recent years, scientists have learned what famous daytime snoozers such as Winston Churchill and Albert Einstein may have known all along – napping can be very beneficial.

While naps don't always compensate for poor or insufficient sleep, a 20- to 30-minute nap can boost your alertness, productivity and mood, according to the National Sleep Foundation (NSF).

Napping isn't for everyone, though. If you have trouble sleeping at night, a too-long nap or napping late in the day may disrupt your sleep even more. Some people find catching zzz's during the day difficult to master due to distractions. For others, napping makes them feel groggy rather than energized afterward.

Advice from the NSF: Getting a full night's sleep – or adequate day-time sleep if you're a shift worker – is generally best for your health. But a short nap may relieve fatigue. *Tip:* Set your alarm for 30 minutes; if you sleep longer than this, you might feel fuzzy and lose the power of your nap.

Sources:

“How to nap.” Boston Globe. Acc. 5/11/09 at www.boston.com/bostonglobe/ideas/naps/.

QUICK STUDIES

Tooth trouble from energy and sports drinks? Excessive consumption of these popular beverages concerns researchers, because they contain citric acid. Prolonged consumption of citric acid has recently been linked to tooth erosion. The acids erode tooth enamel, leading to softer, weaker teeth. If not treated, tooth damage or loss may result. Researchers warn against brushing teeth right after having any beverage containing citric acid. Because the tooth enamel is softened, abrasion from toothpaste may add further damage. Wait at least 30 minutes before brushing your teeth, so the enamel can re-harden.

Sources:

“Sports Drink Consumption Can Cause Tooth Erosion, Study Finds.” NYU, 4/6/09. Acc. 5/13/09 at www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/04/090403122016.htm.

“Popular Energy Drinks Cause Tooth Erosion.” Medical News Today, 3/13/08. Acc. 5/13/09 at www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/100417.php.

“Harm-reduction” cigarettes don’t live up to their name.

Cigarettes labeled “light” or “low-yield” may produce higher concentrations of toxins in sidestream smoke (the kind that burns off the end of the cigarette and others inhale) than in regular cigarettes, according to a UC Riverside study. Also, in 2006 other researchers found that people who smoked light cigarettes were about 50% less likely to quit smoking than regular cigarette smokers.

Sources:

“Harm-reduction cigarettes are more toxic than traditional cigarettes, UC Riverside study finds.” UC Riverside, 12/8/08. Acc. 5/13/09 at www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2008-12/uoc--hca120808.php.

“People who smoke light cigarettes less likely to quit.” University of Pittsburgh. Acc. 5/13/09 at www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2006-06/uopm-pws062706.php